Workplace conflict: A phenomenological study of the types, processes, and consequences of small business conflict

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Abstract
This dissertation concerns the conflicts experienced by small businesses. A small business is defined in this study as a business less than 10 years old with 5 to 50 employees. According to the U.S. Census, the majority of American employees work in small businesses. The literature shows that most of these small business owners report spending a substantial amount of their time and money dealing with conflicts. This dissertation analyzes the types of conflicts reported by small business owners, and some possibilities for resolving those conflicts. The literature suggests that conflicts are inevitable in the workplace, but that there are multiple processes to resolve those conflicts. To study these conflicts and processes, small business owners were surveyed to discuss their experience with conflict. Three variables were examined: (a) the types of conflict, (b) the processes for resolving those conflicts, and (c) the consequences of those conflicts. This was a mixed-methods study, including first a survey and then an interview. The participants were owners of American small businesses. The study revealed the prevalence that bad communication has in creating conflict, and the importance of good communication in resolving conflict. The study also revealed that there are certain conflict resolution processes that increase the likelihood of a positive consequence of conflict. The study’s results provided indicators of effective conflict resolution steps for small business owners. The researcher identified what were the most common types of conflict, conflict resolution processes, and conflict consequences. Finally, the researcher examined what elements of the study were consistent with the literature and what results were unanticipated. These results helped the researcher develop a prospective 5-step model for resolving workplace conflict effectively.

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